

# ON STAGE LOS ANGELES

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2020

## HUMAN INTEREST STORY

Stephen Sachs's world premiere of *Human Interest Story* at the iconic Fountain Theatre follows in the tradition of reaching out into the community. When you decide to see this show, round up some basic items that might help anyone whose luck has left them homeless. There are bins at the venue for depositing these donations.

Directing his own play, Sachs celebrates the 30th anniversary of the theatre he and Producing Director Simon Levy have kept active with revivals and new works in their same funky venue.

With a lively cast (Tarina Pouncy, Rob Nagle, Aleisha Force, Richard Azurdia, Matt Kirkwood, James Harper and Tanya Alexander) Sachs imagines Frank Capra's 1941 movie, *Meet John Doe*, bringing it to life in a modern day metropolis. Sachs mentions in his program notes that driving to the theatre, seeing unfortunate folks living on the streets of Hollywood reminded him of the Gary Cooper, Barbara Stanwyck movie. In Sachs' version, Andy Kramer (excellent Rob Nagle), a well established columnist for the City Chronicle, (truly amazing projections by Matthew Hill) finds himself downsized: virtually booted out the door. In desperation Kramer 'invents' a homeless woman, Jane Doe, whose plight is dire. He composes a manifesto, attributing it to her. The old phrase "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive" comes into play as Kramer in a final column recounts Jane Doe's story and her plan to commit suicide on the Fourth of July in a final act of frustration. A convenient meeting in a park with Betty Frazier, the woman with the cardboard sign, a jobless teacher with an MA in education, evokes a partnership that lays in the course for the story.



Rob Nagle and Tanya Alexander  
Photo by Jenny Graham

Sachs's strong polemic and over wrought acting by a few of the cast members scrambles the pace, but the message is clear. James Harper as Harold Cain, I suspect a deliberate ringer for Alec Baldwin's parody of the 45th president on SNL, blossoms and fades with way too much effort. When the balance between parody and reality falters, the point is less likely to be taken seriously. A nod to Orson Welles's John Foster Kane may be afoot.

The perplexing cross purposes of The Jane Doe Foundation, funded by mayoral candidate Cain and public donations to bring the issue to light makes ethical decisions by Jane thought provoking. Do we make a deal with the devil? Crosstalk on the wide, wide stage contrasts happy talk TV with gushing hostess Aleisha Force's Good Morning, St. Louis, with the tough approach by the Oakland BTV's (Tarina Pouncy with attitude!) counterpart splits focus, but makes a point. A woman with a cardboard sign declaring "I AM NOT INVISIBLE" is parlayed into an examination of a very real issue that effects us all. It plays out dramatically and emotionally, leaving us with our own personal and perplexing questions.

*Human Interest Story* is a must see World Premiere. Hopefully, as with Sachs's earlier efforts, his message flies beyond its comfortable nest on Fountain.

*HUMAN INTEREST STORY*

Written and directed by Stephen Sachs

Through April 5, 2020

The Fountain Theatre

5060 Fountain Ave.

Los Angeles CA 90029

(*Fountain at Normandie*)

Tickets and Information:

(323) 663-1525

[www.FountainTheatre.com](http://www.FountainTheatre.com)